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Time is running out for UNITA

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In July this year Congress repealed the Clark Amendment which had prohibited U.S. support to Angola's freedom fighters, known as UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), who have been courageously fighting the Soviet-supported MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) for 10 years without one dollar of U.S. aid.

Repeal of the Clark Amendment was a historic shift from a weak-kneed approach to foreign policy to an endorsement of the Reagan Doctrine. The time has come to translate this legislative mandate into action. Regrettably, this is easier said than done, because aid to UNITA has now become a political football.

Although the administration and Congress agree in principle that the United States should support Angola's freedom fighters, there are sharp disagreements over the type of aid we should provide (military or humanitarian, overt or covert) and the timing of this aid.

George Shultz has said that any form of U.S. aid right now would be "ill-timed" because it would jeopardize the negotiations between the United States and the MPLA aimed at getting Cuban troops to withdraw from Angola and achieving a peaceful settlement in Namibia.

President Reagan was asked recently why Mr. Shultz opposes aid to UNITA. The New York Times reports that the president replied, "I'm glad you asked that. He isn't. We all believe that a covert operation would be useful to us and have more chance of success right now than the overt proposal that has been made in Congress." Meanwhile, on Nov. 25, a group of 101 members of Congress, led by Democratic Rep. Howard Wolpe of Michigan, wrote President Reagan urging him not to provide covert aid to UNITA.

Tragically, the freedom-loving people of Angola are the ones who pay the price for U.S. inaction or delay. During the five years of negotiations between the United States and the Angolan government, the level of Cuban troops in Angola has increased, to about 35,000. While

Chester Crocker was negotiating with the MPLA in Lusaka last month, the Soviets and their puppets were moving tons of military hardware into Angola for a major, new offensive. The State Department's insistence on deferring U.S. aid in order to try to produce a positive result from the negotiations is a dangerous strategy if it fails. While we talk, the Cubans arm. While we vacillate, Angolan freedom fighters face destruction. Although Mr. Crocker believes the Lusaka talks were "very useful," he is a notorious optimist.

In spite of a massive infusion of Soviet-bloc aid to the MPLA — exceeding \$2 billion during the last two years, according to the U.S. State Department — Jonas Savimbi's forces reportedly control one-third of Angola and maintain a fighting force of 26,000 regulars and 34,000 guerrillas. Impressively, UNITA blunted a major MPLA offensive this fall north of Mavinga, a key UNITA stronghold. The Angolan freedom fighters can be successful in achieving their goal. They are willing to do the fighting. The least we can do is send them the few surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank weapons they need so desperately. Angola's freedom fighters have done a tremendous job in recent years, but they cannot hold off the MPLA much longer without outside support.

According to a communique from UNITA's president, Jonas Savimbi, to UNITA's representative in the United States, Figueiredo Paulo, a new Soviet offensive against UNITA has begun. UNITA sources report that one week ago Soviet IL-76 and AN-26 transport planes averaged 15 flights a day from Lubito and Luanda to Cuito Cuanavale, delivering an entire squadron of Hind helicopter gunships and numerous T-55 tanks as well as fuel, ammunition, light armored vehicles, and artillery to the 6,000 MPLA troops and 1,000 Cuban troops amassed there. According to the American Angolan Public Affairs Council, a force of at least 10 jet fighter bombers began bombing forward UNITA positions near Cuito Cuanavale — which is only 200 miles from UNITA's base at Jamba — on Friday, Dec. 6. UNITA

officials believe the MPLA is preparing for a major offensive designed to seize Jamba.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole's resolution supporting UNITA is fine, as far as it goes, and it enjoys wide bipartisan support. It states that if MPLA intransigence continues, "the U.S. Senate would support material assistance critical to UNITA early in 1986." Although MPLA intransigence almost certainly will continue, that eternal optimist Chester Crocker wants to make one more effort to negotiate with the MPLA — thereby delaying the U.S. material assistance that Bob Dole has in mind. One more try for peace is fine, even if doomed, but it should be the last, even for Mr. Crocker.

Jonas Savimbi's goal — and our goal — in Angola, is to pressure the MPLA into negotiations with UNITA, leading to free elections as promised by the 1975 Alvor Agreement, which the MPLA abrogated. In the absence of military leverage, the MPLA has no incentive to negotiate seriously on Cuban troop withdrawal. U.S. aid to UNITA will strengthen the hand of the moderates within the MPLA government who seek a negotiated settlement.

The best way to help UNITA's cause is to send tangible U.S. support as quickly as possible.

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